

Message Text

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SUBJ: RESPONSE TO OMANI REQUESTS

REF: KUWAIT 392 (NOTAL)

KUWAIT PASS MUSCAT

SUMMARY: THIS CABLE CONTAINS OUR RESPONSES TO OMANI REQUESTS FOR AIR DEFENSE SURVEY AND SALE OF SELECTED MILITARY ITEMS, FOR CONVEYANCE BY AMBASSADOR TO SULTAN QABUS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JANUARY 28 GHASSAN SHAKIR, A SAUDI ENTREPRENEUR AND SECRET

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POLITICAL ADVISER TO SULTAN QABUS OF OMAN, CALLED ON NEA DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY DAVIES. SHAKIR CARRIED WITH HIM LETTER OF INTRODUCTION FROM QABUS TO THE SECRETARY. SEPARATELY HE TRANSMITTED TO US LIST OF MOSTLY COUNTER-

INSURGENCY RELATED MILITARY ITEMS WHICH OMAN WISHES TO ACQUIRE. BESIDES A REQUEST FOR AN AIR DEFENSE SURVEY AND OTHER ITEMS ALREADY RAISED BY OMAN WITH EMBASSY MUSCAT, LIST INCLUDED: IMAGE INTENSIFIERS AND OTHER NIGHT OBSERVATION DEVICES, TRANSISTORIZED MINE DETECTORS, ARMALITE RIFLES AND MACHINE GUNS, CYMBALINE TYPE ANTI-MORTAR RADARS, REPLACEMENT FOR VISCOUNT AND CARABOU AIRCRAFT, AND AN ADDITIONAL THREE FAST PATROL BOATS.

2. SHAKIR TOLD DAVIES (MEMCON TO BE POUCHED): (1) SULTAN QABUS WOULD MAKE STATE VISIT TO IRAN FEB. 26. HE HOPED HE COULD RETAIN HIS GROWING TIES WITH AND MILITARY SUPPORT FROM ARAB STATES WHILE AT SAME TIME RECEIVING IRANIAN ASSISTANCE. HOWEVER, IRAN'S AID TO DATE HAD ALREADY LED TO CONSIDERABLE ARAB CRITICISM, AND QABUS FEARED THAT IRANIANS MIGHT RAISE SENSITIVE SUBJECTS SUCH AS POSSIBLE MEDIAN LINE AGREEMENT AND MUTUAL DEFENSE PACT GOVERNING APPROACHES TO STRAIT OF HORMUZ DURING STATE VISIT. IRAN'S ASSISTANCE NEEDED AND APPRECIATED. HOWEVER, TO AVOID IRANIAN EMBRACE, QABUS NEEDED TO KNOW HOW MUCH HE COULD RELY ON U.S. IN SECURITY FIELD. (2) OMAN SOUGHT TO MOVE AWAY FROM OVER-DEPENDENCE ON BRITISH BY ESTABLISHING TIES WITH EC COUNTRIES AND U.S.; (3) BRITISH RESENTED INCREASED AMERICAN COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY IN OMAN AND ARE SPREADING MALICIOUS TALES TO DISCREDIT U.S. INTERESTS; (4) SULTAN WISHED U.S. TO UPGRADE ITS DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATION IN OMAN; AND (5) OMAN WAS INTERESTED IN RETAINING AGENT FOR MILITARY PROCUREMENT IN WASHINGTON. SHAKIR ALSO INDICATED THAT QABUS WOULD LIKE TO BEGIN REPLACING UK MILITARY EQUIPMENT, WHICH SHAKIR DESCRIBED AS LARGELY INEFFECTIVE AND OUTMODED, WITH AMERICAN EQUIPMENT.

3. RE AIR DEFENSE SURVEY, DEPARTMENT AND DOD AGREE WITH AMBASSADOR STOLTZFUS' RECOMMENDATION THAT WE RESPOND NEGATIVELY TO QABUS' REQUEST. U.S. DOES NOT WISH TO BECOME INVOLVED IN ENDEAVOR WHICH MIGHT UNDERMINE BRITISH MILITARY LEADERSHIP ROLE IN DEALING WITH DHOFAR REBELLION.
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GIVEN MODEST PDRY AIR THREAT TO OMAN AND SCARCE OMANI FINANCIAL AND MANPOWER RESOURCES, WE SEE LITTLE NEED TO IMPLEMENT AN AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM. ACCORDING TO FCO'S PARSONS, CONCLUSIONS OF PRELIMINARY RAF SURVEY ALREADY DONE AT QABUS' REQUEST WERE THAT INSTALLATION OF INTEGRATED AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM WOULD COST 60 MILLION STERLING AND MAINTENANCE MINIMUM OF 12 MILLION STERLING PER YEAR, AN UNREALISTIC FIGURE FOR OMAN'S FINANCES. WHILE OMANIS MIGHT CONCEIVABLY FIND SOME ARAB FUNDING FOR INSTALLATION OF DEFENSE, BRITISH STRONGLY DOUBTED ANY ARAB DONOR WOULD BE PREPARED FOOT YEARLY MAINTENANCE BILL. ALTHOUGH UK ESTIMATES SUGGEST A HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED SYSTEM, BEYOND WHAT MIGHT BE REQUIRED TO COPE WITH PDRY THREAT, WE HAVE

NO DESIRE TO DISPUTE UK EXPERTISE ON GROUND IN OMAN AND DO NOT WISH TO BE PUT IN POSITION WHERE WE COULD BE PLAYED OFF AGAINST UK--TO ADVANTAGE OF NEITHER. IN ANY EVENT, THERE ARE BETTER THINGS ON WHICH TO SPEND LIMITED OMANI RESOURCES, EVEN GIVEN NEW OIL REVENUE. THEREFORE, SUGGEST THAT REPLY BE MADE ALONG FOLLOWING LINES: U.S. HAS GIVEN CAREFUL STUDY TO OMANI REQUEST. WHILE WE UNDERSTAND SULTAN'S CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE AERIAL THREAT FROM PDRY, ON BALANCE WE DO NOT THINK AIR DEFENSE SURVEY ADVISABLE FOR FOLLOWING REASONS:

A. WAR IN DHOFAR APPEARS TO BE GOING WELL. OPERATIONS OF SULTAN'S FORCES, TOGETHER WITH RECENT ASSISTANCE BY IRANIAN CONTINGENT, APPEAR TO BE CONTAINING REBEL FORCES AND REDUCING THEIR EFFECTIVENESS, WHILE SULTAN'S PROGRAMS OF BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC BASE IN DHOFAR BEGINNING HAVE DESIRED EFFECT OF UNDERCUTTING REBEL SUPPORT.

B. MODERN AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM IS EXPENSIVE ITEM AND INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE COSTS WOULD CUT INTO FUNDS BADLY NEEDED FOR DEVELOPMENT.

C. BASED ON OUR MILITARY ESTIMATE, POSSIBLE THREAT OF AIR ATTACK FROM PDRY WOULD NOT JUSTIFY DIVERSION OF SCARCE RESOURCES FROM OTHER HIGHER PRIORITY NEEDS AT THIS TIME.

D. WE APPRECIATE CONFIDENCE MANIFESTED BY OMANI GOVERN-
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MENT IN MAKING THIS REQUEST, AS WELL AS OTHERS REGARDING MILITARY EQUIPMENT NOT READILY AVAILABLE FROM ALTERNATE SOURCES. WE WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO BE HELPFUL WHERE POSSIBLE.

4. BESIDES DELIVERING AIR DEFENSE SURVEY RESPONSE, YOU SHOULD INFORM SULTAN QABUS THAT:

A. WE APPRECIATED BEING BRIEFED RECENTLY IN WASHINGTON ON OMAN'S PRESENT SITUATION AND ITS SECURITY CONCERNS.

B. WE CONTINUE TO LOOK TO REGIONAL COOPERATION AS THE BEST ANSWER TO OMAN'S SECURITY NEEDS. WE ARE HEARTENED BY INCREASING REGIONAL ASSISTANCE TO OMAN, BOTH FROM IRAN AND FROM ARAB STATES SUCH AS ABU DHABI AND JORDAN. WE WOULD WELCOME INCREASED MILITARY COOPERATION WITH OMAN BY ABU DHABI AND JORDAN, AS WELL AS, OF COURSE, SAUDI ARABIA. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT OUR ALLIES, THE BRITISH, HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN SUPPORTING OMANI SECURITY. WE WOULD PLAN TO COORDINATE WITH THEM REGARDING U.S. MILITARY SALES TO OMAN, AS, FOR EXAMPLE, WE HAVE RECENTLY DONE IN RESPONDING TO A REQUEST FOR SENSORS.

C. WE HAVE NOT HAD TIME TO GIVE STUDY TO THE LIST OF MILITARY ITEMS NEEDED BY OMAN AND RECENTLY CONVEYED TO US, BUT WE ARE PREPARED TO CONSIDER SALE OF THESE ITEMS ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS.

D. IT IS OUR STRONG DESIRE TO DEVELOP THE EXISTING TIES BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. WE HOPE AND EXPECT THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO ASK HIS MAJESTY TO ACCEPT A RESIDENT AMERICAN AMBASSADOR AT MUSCAT IN THE NEAR FUTURE. WE ARE

ALSO LOOKING FORWARD TO WORKING CLOSELY WITH AMBASSADOR AHMED MACKI, WHO PRESENTED HIS LETTERS OF CREDENCE TO PRESIDENT NIXON ON FEBRUARY 1.

5. WE DO NOT KNOW TO WHAT DEGREE SHAKIR'S STATEMENT THAT OMAN WOULD LIKE TO REPLACE OBSOLETE OR INEFFECTIVE BRITISH WEAPONS WITH U.S. WEAPONS REPRESENTED HIS OWN OR SULTAN'S FEELINGS. WE DO NOT WANT TO PUT OURSELVES IN A POSITION
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OF COMPETING WITH BRITISH IN OMAN IN MILITARY FIELD AND WE QUESTION ADVISABILITY OF ANY ATTEMPT TO SWITCH APPRECIABLE AMOUNT OF OMAN'S MILITARY EQUIPMENT FROM BRITISH TO U.S. SOURCES, ESPECIALLY SHOULD AMERICAN EQUIPMENT REQUIRE U.S. PERSONNEL FOR MAINTENANCE/TRAINING PURPOSES. AT SAME TIME, WE DO NOT WANT QABUS TO THINK WE INSENSITIVE TO HIS LEGITIMATE MILITARY REQUIREMENTS. THEREFORE, IN CONVEYING POINT C IN PARAGRAPH 4, YOU SHOULD STATE THAT WE ASSUME THAT OMAN WILL WISH CONTINUE TO OBTAIN MOST OF ITS EQUIPMENT AS WELL AS ADVISORY ASSISTANCE FROM UK OR ITS REGIONAL NEIGHBORS. HOWEVER, WE WISH TO HELP OMAN MEET ITS INTERNAL SECURITY NEEDS AND WE WILL CONSIDER U.S. MILITARY SALES TO OMAN FOR ITEMS WHICH CAN BE USED EFFECTIVELY IN AN INSURGENCY SITUATION AND WHICH ARE NOT READILY AVAILABLE ELSEWHERE. KISSINGER

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